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➤CONTRIBUTED✧NOTES.◀

On the Semitic Languages In General.—All the Semitic languages constitute a strictly peculiar and individual family, which is most sharply distinguished from all other human tongues by definite laws and peculiarities. Among these peculiarities the following may be mentioned as the most important :

1) So far as inflection is concerned, all inflectional roots are at least trilateral, or are so considered. The trilateral character is the rule. The indicative roots (Deutewurzel), which are capable of inflection only in a very imperfect manner, are an exception to this rule. They constitute a very ancient portion of the language. These and a number of concept roots (Begriffswurzel) which yield to the ordinary inflection only with great difficulty, and very clearly show the marks of having originated from biliteral roots, point to an older period of the language, when the law of triliterality did not yet exist. This is not to be understood to mean that then no trilateral roots existed at all. In the case of many trilateral roots, every attempt to reduce them to a biliteral character ends in a failure. In that period of the language, the trilateral roots probably occupied the same position with reference to the biliteral that the plurilateral now hold by the side of the trilateral. Gradually their number increased, as by augmentation of sound the biliteral roots were raised to the position of trilaterals, until finally the latter constituted the majority, and caused the biliterals that remained to take their inflection. The present system of both nominal and verbal formation can in its fundamental types—but only in these—easily be older than the law of triliterality.

From this law of triliterality, it follows that the union of a consonant with a vowel does not suffice for the formation of a complete and inflectional root, as, e. g., is the case in the Indo-European and the Tartaric languages. For instance, *as* = to be; *do* = to give; Turkest. *ko-mak* = to place, etc.

2) The position of a vowel within the root does not contribute to the meaning of the root.

3) The variations of the vowels within the three-root consonants does not effect a difference in the meaning of the roots. Roots with the difference in meaning which the German language has in *haben*, *heben*; *laben*, *leben*, *lieben* *loben*; *Last*, *List*, *Lust*, could not exist side by side in any Semitic language.

4) Since then the meaning of the root clings to the group of consonants, the changes in consonants is accordingly restricted to very narrow limits. The different derivatives from the roots can therefore, in the various Semitic languages, not be so unlike each other, as, e. g., is the case in the Indo-European language; for instance, *épi* for *équi*, Sanskrit *asmi*, Lat. *sum* for *es-um*, Gothic *im* for *is-m*. On the other hand, the Semitic makes a most extensive use of vowel changes, in order to bring out the finer shades of meaning which the word conveys over against its root as also over against other words. In this manner the vowel *a* characterizes, in the perfect, the active transitive meaning; *a* in conjunction with *i* and *u*, the intransitive; *u* with *i*, or *a*, the passive. In the same manner the imperfect is distinguished by a peculiar vowel from the perfect. From this it is also plain that the possibility of the mechanical change of vowels is a very lim-

ited one, and is found more in connection with prefixes and suffixes than with roots. In consequence of this, the Semitic languages differ from each other in grammatical features scarcely more than do the Germanic or the Slavonic.

5) The Semitic languages have a number of peculiar sounds that are wanting in other languages. These are the emphatic sounds **ז**, **ז**, **ך** and **ך**. Beside **ז** there seems at one time also to have existed a **ז** da, beside **ך** a **ך** Rain.

6) The Semitic languages have indeed passed beyond the agglutinative stage, and have become inflected languages; however they lack the ability of distinguishing in the verb the time in which the action takes place. In the place of this, the distinction between completed and non-completed action is a substitute of less value, and the distinction between the genders that is carried almost throughout the verb, is, strictly speaking, a luxury. The inflection of nouns, however, especially when compared with the Indo-Germanic, the Tartaric, and the Finnish languages, is very meagre. The richest of the Semitic languages knows only three cases, and cannot everywhere keep even these apart in form.

7) A further want is the inability to form new verbs by the union of a preposition and a verb, or of a noun and a verb. From this is explained the varied and often abrupt transfers of meanings in the Semitic roots. Every outward sign of a transfer of a general meaning upon something special is wanting, or *vice versa*, how one special meaning is applied to another special, or a general to another general. To a small extent this lack is made good by the possibility of deriving new verbs in the form of various verbal stems from nouns (*verba denominata*), whose meanings then contain the special ideas of the noun.

The Semitic languages, on account of their peculiarities as just explained, could most aptly be called the Triliteral languages. The name Semitic, by which they are now known, is a very recent designation. It is first found printed in an article of August Ludwig Schlözer on the Chaldees, printed in the *Repertorium fuer Bibl. und Morgenländ. Literatur* in 1781. The honor of having given the name wide acceptance belongs to Johann Gottfr. Eichhorn, who also claims to have invented the name. Before that these languages were called simply oriental. The name Semitic is based upon the fact that, as far as was known then, those nations that, according to Gen. x., 21 seq., descended from Shem, spoke languages related to the Hebrew. That the Phœnicians, who according to verse 6 were a Hamitic tribe, spoke such a tongue was explained by their having adopted a new language. However, this latter view is in the highest degree improbable. And then Genesis x. gives us only geographical notices in a genealogical garb. Therefore the designation Semitic is inappropriate and misleading. However, since Eichhorn's day it has been generally in vogue, and in scientific discussion it has gradually received a definitely fixed idea. For this reason it is best to retain the name, although not what a correct exegesis of Gen. xi. 10 would suggest as to the linguistic relationship of the children of Shem.

The Semitic languages, by the marks that have been noticed above, are sharply distinguished from all other classes of languages. Especially is it a fixed fact that between the Semitic and the Indo-European groups no genealogical relationship exists. To such a relationship the agreement not only in roots is necessary, but also in the grammatical structure. The latter is in the two families essentially different, and just as little can the former be found. The attempt has often been made to show the connection as far as roots are concerned. But

no other roots except the onomata poetica agree. And if the variety of meanings did not exist in the Semitic roots, probably no attempt at an agreement would have been made. All attempts to show such an agreement do not stand the test of criticism. For the present a comparison of Semitic and Indo-European roots is not possible, because in both groups important preliminary questions are still unsolved. Comparisons between Semitic and Indo-European words is a mark of dilettantic misdemeanor (Unfug). Whenever the same words are found in both the one has borrowed from the other.

According to the opinion of other scholars a certain original relationship exists between the Semitic and the neighboring languages in North Africa, or the Berber languages together with the Egyptian. In reality there is found here not only a similarity in the roots, but also likenesses in grammatical points, as, e. g., the formation of the feminine by a *t*, of the causative by sibilant sounds (Zischlaute), the repetition of the root in order to form the intensive, etc. However, we are too little acquainted with these North African languages to pass a sure judgment. Above all, it must not be overlooked in the discussion of the question as to the relationship of the Semitic with the Indo-European or the African languages, that the same causes have the same results, i. e., that similarly disposed people spontaneously produce similar characteristics in their languages.—*Translated from Stade's Hebr. Grammatik, by G. H. Schodde.*

The Relatives .שׁ and אֲשֶׁר.—There are three views as to the relation of these to each other; viz., (1) The view of F. Hommel,¹ that the two are of independent origin, אֲשֶׁר being the construct of an original אֲשֶׁר (Assyr. ašru), and .שׁ (deflected to .שׁ) being an original sign of relation; (2) What may be called the old view, represented by Ewald and the grammarians generally, which reckons אֲשֶׁר as the original relative, and derives .שׁ or .שׁ by aphæresis of א and assimilation of ר; (3) That of Sperling,² who makes .שׁ the original relative, and derives אֲשֶׁר from it by prefixing an independent pronominal stem *a*, and affixing לָ (which appears also in the Arabic relative alladī), ל being then hardened to ר.

The second view has been sufficiently refuted by Sperling. Of the first and third, the third seems to the present writer to contain the essence of the truth, in deriving אֲשֶׁר from .שׁ. Hommel's objections may be reduced to three;—1st. There is an ašar in Assyrian, the construct of the noun ašru, and this word is used relatively. In reply, it may be stated that ašar is frequently used relatively where place is referred to (and this may be explained as a loose mode of expression with the relative omitted [cf. Isa. XXIX., 1; perhaps also Job XVIII., 21], or as a natural extension of the idea of place to place *where*); but no well attested instance has been cited to prove an extension of its meaning to other relations.³ Hommel indeed quotes I R. 59, II., 14 seq.:—(14) šadim nisûti (15) ištu tamti îliti (16) adi tamti šapliti, (17) urhûm aštûtim, (18) padanim pihûti, (19) ašar kibsišu arrusu (20) šîpila

¹ In ZDMG., 1878, pp. 708–715.

² *Die Nota Relationis im Hebraeischen*, Jena, 1876.

³ This point seemed so important, and the writer's knowledge of Assyrian so meagre, that he has consulted his friend Dr. Lyon on the subject, who informs him that he has found no passage where ašar is used relatively save in respect to place.